

American Battlefield Protection Program Battlefield Survey Manual

This handbook is designed to focus the attention of battlefield researchers on a standard methodology that will provide state historic preservation offices, local planners, preservation advocates, and others with reliable information. Using this methodology will enable the ABPP to compare information across all wars and all sites. Large parts of the methodology used to study the Civil War can be adapted to address the battlefields of other wars; particularly wars between organized armies where there is written documentation of the events. Researchers of frontier battles, for which there is meager documentation, may be forced to rely more heavily on oral traditions and the work of archeologists to locate and verify sites.

Part One: Introduction

1. 1990 Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Battlefield Survey

This approach to researching, documenting, and mapping battlefields was developed to assist the work of the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, established by Congress in 1990 by the Civil War Sites Study Act (P.L. 101-628). The Commission identified 384 principal military events of the Civil War and solicited volunteers to visit each of the sites. The goal of these field visits was to locate the historic extent of the battlefields on modern maps, determine site integrity, provide an overview of surviving resources, and assess short- and long-term threats to integrity. The baseline data collected during the CWSAC field visits is summarized in the Commission's "Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields."¹

The Commission's work was a good beginning, but much remains to be done before our nation's battlefields are documented properly. The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) of the National Park Service maintains and updates files on the Civil War's principal military events, and the program has expanded its research to encompass other American Wars. As of August 1999, the ABPP has revised and updated the survey manual and methodology for use in the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Historic Preservation Study authorized by Congress.

2. CWSAC Survey Methodology

Because of the pressures of time and funding, the Commission approached the survey of 384 battlefields as a cooperative venture. Battlefield coordinators were established and funded for the affected park service regions. These coordinators were responsible for accomplishing the surveys and relied on volunteers, and park service or state historic preservation office historians, to conduct the surveys. Because the survey was originally envisioned as a "quick" approach, surveyors were asked to rely heavily on published sources and local experts to produce maps and documentation. Research in primary documents and unpublished sources was required only when there were discrepancies in existing accounts of a battle.

To compensate for this disadvantage in research, the ABPP developed a methodology that relied heavily on locating features on the ground using readily available sources. These "defining features" (so-called because they define the battlefield on the landscape) serve to pin battle events to identifiable locations. Finding and mapping the structures and structure sites, road traces, topographic features, and other spots mentioned in the accounts, the surveyor was sure to be in the right location. Details of a battle might not be recorded, but the main location or "core" of the battlefield would be recognized. The purpose of the survey was to gain a broad view of the condition of and threats to Civil War battlefields in the United States. The surveys accomplished this goal and accomplished it very well.

The CWSAC methodology did have weaknesses, however. First, it relied on many people with different backgrounds and levels of expertise. In most cases, volunteers produced reliable documentation and maps. In other cases, the information on battlefields was less than complete. The quality of information in the files varies according to the knowledge of the surveyor, the

¹ Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, *Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*. Washington DC: National Park Service, 1993.

sources consulted, time spent in the field, and the reliability of local guides. Second, the information gathered from the field varied substantially in the details. Some surveyors consulted many sources, some only a few; some found a large number of defining features, others found few; some listed and located defining features but did not display them on the map. Perhaps, the largest incomparability across the sites is how boundaries were drawn for the battlefields. Areas tended to expand according to how much a surveyor researched a battle or according to individual inclinations toward generosity or caution.

This updated version of the survey manual aims to resolve some of these problems by improving the survey forms and tightening definitions and procedures. The ABPP learns from everyone who applies the methodology and will continue to add material or make changes, as new information is available.

3. Importance of Documentation for Preservation

Historians, archeologists, park staff, preservationists, battlefield friends groups, and other interested parties function as “brokers of history.” They have the knowledge of battlefield resources, the library and archives, and access to supporting maps and documentation that reveal the significance of battlefield features. They have the perspective to respond to landowners’ questions, to identify historic resources found on private property, and to validate the significance of those resources.

Much destruction of historic and cultural resources occurs through ignorance of significance. A farmer may know of a battle and know of an earthwork on his property but not understand how this relates to other surviving resources in the vicinity. He may not understand that a historian feels that the earthwork is important for its location or function in the battle. To him, it is an interesting curiosity. A developer putting in a housing tract may be unaware of a historic road trace that runs through the property or not understand that this trace functioned as the main route of advance for one of the armies. He may view a line of trenches--if he knows of its existence--as an obstacle to clearing a site for construction and see no harm in bulldozing the trenches. The historian feels the loss, and one more piece of the puzzle of history disappears.

Many landowners might choose to preserve a historic feature on their property if convinced of its importance to the larger picture of history. Many responsible developers would plan around a line of trenches and offer easements if informed of its existence and convinced of its significance. Preserved historic features, a hiking trail along the old road trace, and an open vista for interpreting battle action might enhance the attractiveness of the property to prospective buyers. A local government may decide that encouraging the preservation of historic resources can attract tourists to the community and, therefore, be good for business. Only park staff, historians, or battlefield friends can supply the authoritative information needed for others in the community to make informed decisions about resource protection.

Identification, documentation, and mapping of a battlefield's historic and cultural resources are an essential first step for any preservation outreach. The community cannot protect what it does not know exists. Planners are reluctant to give credence to undocumented features. Landowners cannot be expected to understand how features on their property contribute to the value of the entire battlefield. The preservationists' mission of encouraging the community to protect important resources is supported and made immeasurably easier by comprehensive survey and accurate

mapping.

4. Defining Battlefield Boundaries

The first step toward battlefield preservation is defining exactly where the battlefield is and what remains to preserve. This requires establishing a boundary around the battlefield on a map. The boundary must be historically defensible; historical and archaeological evidence and source materials must prove that the boundaries encompass legitimate historic resources associated with the battle.

Battlefield areas should be defined as objectively as possible. The area will include the salient places where events occurred and important landmarks, and should accurately reflect the extent of the battle. The initial survey should include all known resources associated with the battle. Later, local organizations may negotiate with landowners to preserve a smaller portion of battlefield land. Once the battlefield survey is completed and the final battlefield map marked with defining features and boundaries, informed preservation decisions can be made. Keep in mind, however, that deciding what landscapes and features to preserve and how to preserve them are separate economic and political processes from the survey itself.

Mapping the historic extent of the battlefield stakes a claim on the land in the mind of the public, preservationists, local governments, and landowners. Mapped battlefield boundaries

- ◆ graphically demonstrate the amount and type of land composing the battlefield
- ◆ simplify and clarify the preservation message;
- ◆ give state and county planners a specific land area to consider; and
- ◆ serve as a rallying point for grassroots fundraising, and educational and political action

Using the methodology outlined in this manual, surveyors are asked to create three boundaries for a battlefield: *Study Area*, which encompasses the ground over which units maneuvered in preparation for combat; *Core Area*, which defines the area of combat; and *Potential National Register Boundary* (PotNR), which contains only those portions of the battlefield that have retained integrity. Study and Core Areas are based on historical research and are drawn regardless of how land use has changed since the time of the battle. By definition, the Core Area is always contained within the Study Area. The PotNR boundary is based on integrity and may encompass portions of both the Study and Core Areas.

5. Possibilities for Preservation

The ultimate purposes of battlefield survey, documentation, and mapping are preservation and education. There are no magic solutions for preserving battlefields, only a range of alternatives that must be mixed and matched in ways that are appropriate for each specific site and setting. Some battlefields will remain entirely in private hands; some may become local or state parks; most preservation efforts will require a partnership of public and private interests. Some of the alternatives available to state and local governments and to private individuals and organizations are

outlined below:²

Outright Purchase of Land or Easements

Pros: Permanent protection of the land.

Cons: Land and easement purchases can be expensive, often beyond the means of local preservation groups. There are ways to minimize expenses, such as buying development rights, negotiating preservation easements, or purchasing a strip of land along the highway to control access. The danger of acquisition by a small battlefield friends group is that it might find itself the custodian of properties that it cannot afford to protect and maintain. Many land trusts and preservation groups purchase land then transfer their holdings as parkland to authorized agencies, such as a state or county government.

Protective Zoning Ordinances

In many states, local governments have the power to regulate private land use through zoning ordinances. Types of protective zoning include Low-Density Agricultural Protection Zoning, Sliding-Scale Agricultural Protection Zoning, Open Space Zoning, Conservation Development Design, Urban Growth Boundaries, Historic Overlay Zoning, and Agricultural Districts.

Pros: Zoning is flexible and reflective of a community's desire to protect its historic resources. Creative zoning that retains the agricultural or rural character of the land may accomplish two short-term goals. First, the land and its resources are protected from immediate development. Second, creative zoning will often hold real estate prices at agricultural levels, which are generally lower than the prices on property zoned for commercial or multi-family residential use. Fixing land prices at this lower level allows a community or preservation group time to raise the funds necessary to purchase the property in fee or easement to permanently protect the battlefield.

Cons: Partial, often transitory, protection of the land. Protective zoning can be overturned or removed with a change in the local political administration. Increasing pressure from developers or an escalating real estate market often will influence local leaders to rethink and revoke protective zoning measures.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture. Owners of private properties listed in the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. The National Park Service administers the National Register.

Pros: This honorary designation often encourages landowners and communities to care for their historic resources. Listed properties are duly considered in the planning for Federal, federally licensed, or federally assisted projects (known as the Section 106 process). Landowners may also be eligible for Federal rehabilitation tax credits. Some states also offer state tax credits for rehabilitation of National Register properties.

Cons: Provides no legal protection for historic resources.

² For a full treatment of available preservation measures, see Elizabeth B. Waters, *Civil War Heritage Preservation: A Study of Alternatives*, National Park Service, 1992.

State Registers

Most states have established a statewide register of historic places similar to the National Register. Most state registers are administered by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Pros: This honorary designation often encourages landowners and communities to care for their historic resources. State laws may provide for a state equivalent to the Section 106 process. Some states offer tax credits for rehabilitation of properties in their state register.

Cons: Usually does not provide legal protection for historic resources.

Achieving State or Federal recognition for a battlefield can provide a friends group with considerable political clout at the local, state, and national levels. State or Federal designation leads to an increase in public attention and interest in preservation. Many battlefields and related resources deserve to be recognized by an official designation but are not yet registered. The process may be initiated by the action of governments agencies, landowners, or other interested organizations and individuals.